DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 219 JC 690 258

By-Hahn, Thomas C.
The Local Governing Board: Asset or Liability?
Pub Date Dec 68
Note-21p.; Seminar paper
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.15
Descriptors-*Boards of Education, *Governing Boards, *Junior Colleges

Current lay board membership was found to come from business owner/manager (35%), professional/technical (27%), and seven other occupational groups. Nearly half were college graduates. Membership qualifications were discussed. A poll of administrators showed that 98% preferred popular election for choosing members. Board responsibilities included planning and policy making, policy enforcement, and evaluation of the policies in relation to the system's goals. Individual members had to know education laws or where to find them and were not to make binding decisions outside the board. Among the favorable opinions were that lay boards are representative and responsive, are outside party politics and the spoils system, provide program continuity and management economy, and operate openly and responsibly. Principal objections were that they are involved only part-time and are subject to pressure from special-interest groups. Recommendations for improving their composition and function included (1) higher qualification for membership, (2) broader membership, (3) outside advisors and other information resources for the board, (4) closer communication with professional educators, (5) more contact with state and federal lawmakers and professional groups, and (6) more community support, service, and funds to offset members' part-time operation and permit them to enlarge their activities beyond regular board meetings. (HH)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED031219

THE LOCAL GOVERNING BOARD: ASSET OR LIABILITY?

A Research Paper

Presented to

Dr. Ralph Prator

University of California

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Education 441-D

Junior College Administration

---

by

Thomas C. Hahn

December, 1968

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

JUN 12 1969

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

JC 690 258

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction..... 1

Historical Retrospect..... 2

The Contemporary Board--A Composite View..... 3

A. Composition of the School Board..... 3

B. Qualifications for School Board Members... 4

C. Roles and Duties of School Board Members.. 4

D. Governance of California Junior Colleges.. 5

The Contemporary Board--An analysis..... 6

A. Positive Appraisals..... 6

B. Negative Appraisals..... 8

A Review of Proposed Changes and Recommendations by Professional Educators.....10

Proposed Recommendations for Improving the Composition and Operational Aspects of the Local Governing Board.....13

Bibliography.....18

References.....19

THE LAY SCHOOL BOARD: ASSET OR LIABILITY?

Introduction

The year, 1958, will long be remembered as the "Year of Sputnik"; it may also be recalled as the "Year of Decision" for some 63,000 local school boards across our land. Accentuated by the hue and cry of a "knowledge gap" between ourselves and the communist world, extreme pressure from the public-at-large, state and federal governments have been focused on our nations schools, and in particular on those who through local mandates control them. In essence a gauntlet has been flung at the "feet" of the lay school board. Can they meet the contemporary "challenges" of teacher strikes and sanctions, state legislation in regard to course content and graduation requirements; federal legislation encouraging pupil testing programs and improvement of instruction in science-oriented subjects; foundation-sponsered experiments in ETV, teaching machines, computer-assisted instruction, and ungraded schools? Before examining the issues, a review of the "evolution" or historical development of local control is in order.

Historical Retrospect

Basic to the American system of education, is the fact that the individual states constitute the legal authority in the field of education. Traditionally, the state has delegated this responsibility to the local community, thereby establishing itself in a "supervisory" capacity rather than a "central authority." Therefore, the local community through the elected school board, has played the major role in the support, control, and general conduct of the public school.

Historically, the local government of public education has experienced three phases. In the early days, during approximately the first 200 years of our history, the board or school committee actually administered schools. From the middle of the last century through the first 40 years of the present one, the tendency gradually grew for boards to turn administration over to professional administrators. The latter decades were the "hay day" of the "lay" board, in the sense that board work was conducted more in the spirit of lay citizen activity and less along professional or semi-professional lines. Since 1940, we seem to be in the third phase, with emphasis on the team approach to educational administrative problems. Boards and administrators, while theoretically retaining their respective identities as laymen and professionals, are working ever more

closely together. (Grieder, 3:52)

The Contemporary Board--A Composite View

The accurate assessment or evaluation of the effectiveness of the lay school board in maintaining public education must include an examination of the board itself. In satisfying this objective, data is presented as follows: (A) Composition of the board, (B) Qualifications of members, (C) Roles and duties of individual members as well as the total board, and (D) Governance of local colleges.

A. Composition of the School Board

A recent national survey of the occupational distribution of board members was published in Bulletin 8 of the U.S. Office of Education (9:63). It was based on a sample of 4000 boards with a total of 24,000 members and gives the following membership breakdown:

1. 35% owners, officials or managers of business enterprises
2. 27% professional and technical services
3. 12% farmers
4. 7% sales and clerical personnel
5. 7% skilled workers and foremen
6. 7% housewives
7. 2% semi-skilled and unskilled
8. 1% service workers
9. 2% retired

Donald G. Nugent, Executive Director of the Texas association of School Boards recently stated (11:87) that nation-wide, over 90 per cent of board members are elected officials 80 per cent elected according to NEA officials (9:63). Over 80 per cent of them serve without pay. Educationally, they are well above the average population (nearly one-half are college graduates, while only 7.7 per cent are not high school graduates). A vast majority of

school board members are also active members of civic, professional, business, and/or social groups which have both political and educational interests.

B. Qualifications for School Board Members

At the present time, there are few legal standards or criteria established for school board members. The one stipulation is that to run for election, a prospective member must be a citizen of the United States, and of legal age. In a national opinion poll of administrators by a well known journal (12:76), the issue of establishing by law, qualifications for school board members was reviewed. The results of that poll are given below:

Do you believe that there should be laws setting up certain qualifications for candidates for the board of education or the school committee?-------Yes 78% No 22%

If YES, what qualifications would you suggest?

1. Eighth Grade Education---------- 8%
2. High School: Graduation---------40%
3. College: Graduation---------- 7%
4. Ownership of Property----------23%
5. Parents of Children now in school----------22%

Which method of selection of members do you prefer?

1. Election by nonpartisan vote-----98%
2. Appointment by:
   - Mayor---------- 1%
   - Governor---------- 0%
   - Some other governmental agent or agency------- 1%

It is clear that the majority of administrators polled are in favor of popular vote over appointments. It is also evident that group feeling for minimum standards consisting of a high school education should be prerequisite to a seat on the school board.

C. Roles and Duties of School Board Members

An article in the March, 1966 issue of the Catholic School Hournal, established some guidelines for school board action.

1. Total Board Responsibility
   a. The board of education must be the planning and policy-making authority of the local school district. The board determines spedific or general needs, assesses the resources available for meeting the needs, and decides on a course of action.
   b. Board Policy is expressed through the minutes of its meetings, through the document of a school budget; some boards codify policy with a rules and regulation handbook.
   c. Policy enforcement--carried out by periodic or special reports from the chief school office, business manager, etc.
   d. Evaluation--the board should evaluate not only the performance of the chief executive officer and his subordinates, but also its own endeavors. Emphasis should be placed on possessing a clear understanding of goals, maintaining effective working interrelationships, and well-chosen subordinates.
2. Individual Responsibility
   a-1. Planning and policy-making functions of the board are dependent on full personal knowledge of the laws governing education.
   a-2. Current knowledge through seeking advice or counsel.
   b. A school board can formulate policy only as a board in regular or special meeting. An individual member cannot make a binding decision.
   c. All official communication concluded between the board and staff members should be through the chief school officer.
   d. Board members should be intelligent, creative, have the ability to anticipate change and its relationship to chosen educational goals.

D. Governance of California Junior Colleges

Most junior colleges are governed by independent boards of trustees. A number are governed by unified boards which have jurisdiction over public education from kindergarten through junior college. A smaller number are legally part of junior college districts but are gov-

erned by common boards and common administrations. For example, the Los Angeles Junior College District Board of Education is the governing board for the districts colleges but the members of the board are also members of the Los Angeles Unified District Board. Also, many members of the central administration staff serve both districts. A number of districts in transition from "common board" to "separate board" governance may have a single board, but the administrations have been separated. The board has two sets of administrators reporting to it--the unified and the junior college eg. Sweetwater Junior College District (Lombardi, 10:30).

The Contemporary Lay School Board--An Analysis

The following evaluation of the effectiveness of local school boards in meeting their obligations has been compiled from several sources. Summary statements incorporating all of these sources have been grouped in one of two catagories, representing either a favorable view of school board action or dissatisfaction with the present structure and function.

A. Positive Appraisals

Frank F. Beach and Robert S. Will (1:113, 125), both associated with the U.S. Office of Education, recently wrote an article entitled "Why Have a Board of Education?" The following excerpts are from that article:

1. A board of education is more representative of the total population and therefore more responsive to the "will of the people" than an individual policy-making agent is.
2. A board of education can make wiser and more sound policy decisions than a single individual can make.
3. A board of education serves as a safeguard against the abuses of descretionary powers.
4. It acts as a safeguard against the involvement of education in partisan politics and the spoils system.

5. It is a safeguard against needless disruption in the continuity of an education program.
6. It provides economical means for management and control of the educational program.
7. It provides a safeguard against fraud and malfeasance.

Many other authors, in addition to these two have expressed similar positive opinions concerning the local school board. Most have discussed the same basic principles, but usually with a slightly different view. Howard B. Holt (6:1-3) has pointed out that the flexibility or plasticity of the American school has had its origins in its close tie to the local community that gives it support and directions. He also stated the following reasons for the "success" of the school board:

1. Board members are generally better educated, wealthier, more active in community affairs, and probably smarter than the average person in the community.
2. "Control from law limitations and state department supervision, determines many matters of curriculum, buildings, and teacher qualifications in a manner which negates the possibility of board mismanagement.
3. Few boards create policy in a vacuum; they lean heavily on professional advice and are sensitive to opinions from the community and teaching staffs.
4. School boards operate in open, legally called meetings where "public" participation is possible.

Dr. Calvin Grieder (5:6) has stated that among the basic strengths in the board system is its role in encouraging and developing the operation of civic responsibility and iniative, while providing a system that is very responsive to the "will of the people".

Dr. John Lombardi in a recent article in the Junior College Journal (10:27-31), discussed some of the considerations extended to the "local control concept" when the State Legislature created the new Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.

Senate Bill 669, Section 197 transferred to the new Board of Governors "the duties, powers, purposes, responsibilities, and jurisdiction heretofore vested in the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the Director of Education, with respect to the management, administration, and control of the junior colleges." At the same time, the legislature incorporated into the law, safeguards to allay fears that a state board devoted exclusively to junior colleges might become more prescriptive than the old state board and might erode the tradition of local control. Assurances on the latter point were inserted in almost every paragraph of the law. Surely the effort which the legislature demonstrated in preserving local control is the finest of testimonials to the operational success of the "local board system".

B. Negative Appraisals

B. Everard Blanchard (2:42,43) has outlined some problem areas which he feels are implicit in local board control. He has stated that a large proportion of the public seems to have no interest in education and fails to participate in school board elections, thereby the selection of members is often not representative, nor are those elected qualified or even informed about the issues. Secondly, he feels that the board of education is rarely permitted to work "insulated" from "the play of social forces", i.e. pressure groups, etc. As a result, decisions may not reflect the "will of the people", but of special interest groups. His third, and probably most valid point is the opinion that the "part-time" work of school boards is not adequate to meet the needs of modern educational systems. In summation, Blanchard sees education as a professional pursuti being guided and directed by the part-time, inexperienced board member.

Criticism of a milder nature has been levelled at the lay board by Dr. Calvin Grieder in two articles in The Nations Schools (3:5). Basically, he agrees with Blanchard's (5) last position concerning the "part-time" involvement of the board in what appears to be a "full-time" occupation--an occupation increasing in its complexity. Grieder views contemporary board action as constituting merely a

"legal review" of prior professional administrative policy and decision-making commitments.

Myron Liebermann (8) has not only criticized lay board organization, but also gives some insight into what he calls the "demise of local control". His rationales for this "demise" include:

1. Population mobility and interdependence have undermined the notion that local communities ought to have a free hand in educating their children.
2. National survival now requires educational policies and programs which are not subject to local veto.
3. Local control cannot in practice be reconciled with the ideals of a democratic society or at least with the "great society".
4. Local control is a major cause of the dull parochialism and attenuated totalitarianism that characterizes public education in operation.

Liebermann has also outlined some specific problem areas which he feels are inherent in local school board control.

1. The relative ease by which preponderant groups or "pressure" groups can enforce a policy of intellectual protectionism for its "sacred cows", i.e. racial studies, evolution, political concepts, etc.
2. Local control over schools has obstructed rather than facilitated educational research, i.e. evaluation and comparison of operation with other districts or theoritical models.
3. The breakdown of local support for public education seems to be a general trend on the increase. Local sources are providing a decreasing percentage of a total expenditures, while expenditures by state and federal agencies are increasing. Liebermann concludes that the rise of local property taxes to the straining point, coupled with political activity aimed at defeat of local board issues, have all effectively blocked building and expansion programs to the point that only through financial intervention by the federal government can a solution be found.

> Donald G. Nugent (11:87), in an article published in Educational Leadership, pointed out that local control has historically proved to be the most expeditious and economical method of organization. He also indicated that the average lay school board member is educationally, financially, and politically well above the average citizen. However, he indicated concern in that local boards, as duly constituted legal bodies, have no organized voice which can be heard in Washington to aid in the funding and implementation of nationally recommended programs. He recommends that school boards find ways to stay informed about political decisions which will influence the public schools, and also ways to express informed opinions regarding these decisions before they are made.

A Review of Proposed Changes and Recommendations--by Professional Educators

Many proposed changes have been put forth by professional educators to alter both the lay board structure and its function. The following items represent a summary of these recommendations.

Blanchard (2) and Liebermann (8) concur in the view that local school boards should be composed of professionals from within the teaching field. However, they differ on the term "professional". Blanchard proposes boards composed of teachers selected by general election from the total faculty of the school system. Liebermann proposes that school boards include professional educators, not practicing teachers. He even goes so far as to limit the activities of laymen to "peripheral and ceremonial functions of education", i.e. the rights of

parents and students to determine whether a college preparatory or vocational program should be undertaken.

Mr. Harold Howe, U.S. Commissioner of Education (7:31, 58, 60) has summed up his views on the lay board by stating: "we must make the best of the educator-layman relationship as it is, rather than trying to alter lines" for improved board management of schools:

1. Establish open lines of communication to both the community and school administration.
2. Select board members who are broadly representative of the community and who have shown iniative in civic responsibility and leadership.
3. Increase broader local control of education by increasing the number of school boards in the densely populated urban areas (decentralized large districts).
4. Encourage a responsible interest in the schools by laymen who hold no official position except that of citizen.
5. Educators should change their attitude toward laymen--use this vast "resource" to aid in making responsible decisions for both the short and long range future.

Dr. Calvin Grieder (4:64-65) has done comparative research on the American board system in relation to the British Education Committees. "Education Committees" (50-100 members), as they presently organized under the British system, are appointed by the county and city is reconstituted each year, with quite a large carryover of reappointed members. Normally, the education committee meets five times a year in regular meetings. These sessions are devoted to receiving, or hearing, and discussing reports from sub-committees. Five or more of these standing sub-committees, each numbering 10 to 20 or more per-

sons, typically focus on primary education, secondary education, finance, buildings, special schools, and the like. Apparently, the real work of the education committees is done in the sub-committees who make recommendations to the education committee. In turn, the education committee makes recommendations to the county council or city council for action, i.e. the education committee itself has no real authority (or financial control)--the real authority is vested in the council. Superimposed over the sub-committee, committee, council hierarchy, are the "school managers" or "board of governors" appointed for each school by the county and city councils. These boards have no real authority and primarily serve as "auxillaries" or advisors to the head master of a school.

In a comparative evaluation of the two systems Dr. Grieder concludes that the apparent disadvantages inherent in the British system, i.e. an "unmanageable" beauracracy far exceed any advantages that this plan might offer.

The single, most significant recent event which should prove to have great impact on the local governing board was the establishment of the Governing Board of the California Community Colleges. In reviewing this development, Lombardi (10:27-31), summarized what this act accomplished:

1. It separates the junior colleges from the elementary and secondary schools at the state level.
2. It provides a statewide spokesman in the chief

executive officer.
3. It places junior college representatives on the Coordinating Council for Higher Education who have an official status as duly constituted government officers similar to those of the state college system and the University of California.
4. It reaffirms the secondary status of the junior college for certain financial purposes.
5. It reaffirms local control of junior college.
6. It provides for a thorough study "to spell out specifics concerning finance, administration, control, and other matters".

The act does not:

1. Disturb the affiliation of junior colleges still associated with unified districts.
2. Change the method of financial support of junior colleges.
3. Change the jurisdiction over junior colleges of the county superintendent of schools.
4. Require any change in the names of the colleges or of the districts governing them.

Proposed Recommendations for Improving the Composition and Operational Aspects of the Local Governing Board

At this point, it seems logical to summarize and interpret the data presented so far. It is unquestionably clear that the lay school board, operating as "managers" of the local school district, has not only proved to be an historically sound organizational system but also extremely functional from both a political and financial standpoint. It is also evident, that many of the drastic revisions and reorganization schemes proposed by some educators, i.e. Blanchard and Liebermann, stem from federal control, rather than from direct evidence of "incompetent" local board management.

The critics of the board system, whether pro or con have made significant contributions in bringing to light problem areas in both board form or composition and its function. These problem areas are outlined below with suggestions and recommendations for improvement and/or change included.

1. Board Composition: Criticism from many sources has been levelled at the board for "poor representation" in its membership. This problem may be rooted in the manner in which board members are selected--namely, through non-partisan election. Only a small minority of the district population has the inclination to campaign and serve in such a capacity, therefore, board membership probably represents the "best" that the district has to offer in terms of politically and civically active citizens. If this is "poor representation", then our whole political system is in trouble. Several recommendations are offered which might strengthen the present board structure: (a) establish the qualification of a high school education or its equivalent as prerequisite to board membership (12:75), and (b) increase the number of participating board members, possibly with one appointed member from either the city council, or county board of supervisors. The latter action might insure closer interrelationships and open communications between the board and the total community.

2. Non-Board Participation: This is an area of concern reflected again and again in the literature. It is often under the guise of such topics as board-community relations, teacher-board relations, professional educator-board relations, lay citizen-board relations, board "knowledgability", reliance on professional advice, and the part-time work of the board compared to its "full-time" job. All of these topics relate to the original "challenge" referred to on page one of this paper. Can the local school board, by itself, maintain its efficiency of operation and high standards in public schools as the complexity of modern society increases its demands? The answer is no! Local boards must turn to the "outside" for advice and direction. A suggested program for the board to achieve maximum information and guidance without sacrificing autonomy would be to seek out and formally organize community, professional, and political "resource" groups or committees to serve as advisors to the board when needed. Such tasks as general fact-finding, legal council, funding data, etc. could be parcelled out to these groups allowing ample time for the increasing multiplicity of tasks and policy decisions which are presently placing such a heavy demand on the boards' time and talents. "Resource" groups operating in this capacity would not only greatly facilitate efficient board action, but would represent utilization of now dormant "talent reserve" residing within the school district.

3. Communication: The problem of effective communication between inter-related parties is primarily a problem of human behavior. The lack of substantial two-way communication between the board of education and school personnel (administrators and teachers) has been criticized by many authors. This "weakness" as indicated by Grieder (3:52) is presently being corrected as outside pressures force the board and professional educators into a closer working relationship. To some extent, the proposed "resource" groups referred to in item 2 would hasten the establishment and development of lines of communication between the board and the various groups which lie within its sphere of influence. In summary, most critics agree that the "environmental forces" eluded to in the opening paragraph of this paper will eventually cause a greater interdependence to develop between the instructional staff, administrators, and the lay board.

4. Political Awareness: Several authors have characterized the board as acting in a "political vacuum", virtually unaware of national and state trends in education. Here again, is a problem in communication which might be remedied by establishing and maintaining contact with the following individuals or groups:

a. Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges (10:27-31)
b. Local congressman--information on federal legislation
c. State assemblymen and representatives--state and local trends in attitudes, policies, etc. as related to education

d. Lobbyists--under contract to professional organizations (both state and federal)
e. Professional associations
f. Cooperative school board associations

5. Time: The question is not whether the lay board can successfully meet its responsibilities, but rather, is enough time alloted the board to operate? Traditionally, board members have functioned on a part-time basis, serving without pay. Even with the ever growing demands of modern society, efficient and quality management of public schools can be maintained by local boards if: (a) they are given support and aid from the "total community" via resource groups, (b) open and effective communication between all organization levels exists, and (c) political awareness, i.e. information is made available. In addition, it is recommended that a generous expense account, or "retainer", or both be established either for the board as a group or individual members. These funds would serve to facilitate growth in all of the above areas by: (a) promoting attendance at regional, state, and national conferences/conventions, and (b) promoting the policy of "meet and confer" irregardless of the number of meetings required to get the job done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Beach, Fred F. and R.S. Will. "Why Have a Board of Education?" School Life, 37(8), May 1955, p. 113,125.

2. Blanchard, B. Everard. "Eternity of Chaos". National Association of Secondary-School Principals Bulletin, 44(254), March 1960, p. 40-43.

3. Grieder, Calvin. "The Passing of the Lay School Board." The Nations Schools 61(3), March 1958, p. 52-53.

4. _____. "Education Committees in Britain". The Nations Schools 63(2), February 1959, p. 64-65.

5. _____. "School Boards are less then Perfect but Bound to Last". The Nations Schools 73(6). June 1964, p. 6.

6. Holt, Howard B. "Are School Boards Necessary?" The Education Digest XXIX(6), February 1964, p. 1-3.

7. Howe, Harold II. "Should Educators or Boards Control our Public Schools". The Nations Schools 78(6). December 1966, p. 30-31 and 58-60.

8. Liebermann, Myron. The Future of Public Education. University of Chicago Press.

9. _____. "Local Boards of Education". National Education Association Research Bulletin 42(2), May 1964, p. 63.

10. Lombardi, John. "California's New State Board". Junior College Journal 38, March 1968, p. 27-31.

11. Nugent, Donald G. "Are Local Control and Lay Boards Obsolete?" Educational Leadership 22(2), November 1964, p. 85-87.

12. "Opinion Poll". The Nations Schools. 58(6), December 1956, p. 75.

13. "Responsibilities of School Board Members". Catholic School Journal 66(3), March 1966, p. 76.

REFERENCES

Books

1. Campbell, R. F. et. al. 1965. The Organization and Control of American Schools. C.E. Merrill.

2. Liebermann, Myron. 1960. The Future of Public Education. University of Chicago Press.

3. Moehlman, A.B. 1951. School Administration. Houghton Mifflin.

4. Morphet, Edgar LeRoy, R. L. Johns, and T. L. Reller. 1959. Educational Administration: Concepts, Practices, and Issues. Prentice-Hall.

Articles

1. Gustad, John W. "Community, Consensus and Conflict". Educational Record, Fall 1966. p. 433-441.

2. Henderson. "State Planning and Coordination of Public and Private Education". Education Record 47(4) Fall 1966. p. 503-509.

3. Reilly, Desmond M. C. "Why be a School Board Member?" American School Board Journal Vol. 150-151. May 1965. p. 11-12.

4. Walton, John. "The Theoritical Study of Educational Administration". Harvard Educational Review 25(3). 1955.